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ABSTRACT

Past research on adults' fear of, and hostile reactions toward, individuals with Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and homosexuals has tended to treat these reactions as being unidimensional. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the underlying dimensions of attitudes toward individuals with AIDS and homosexuals. A second purpose was to examine the associations between the emergent underlying dimensions for the two sets of attitudes. Undergraduate and graduate students (N=358) completed a demographic questionnaire, a 14-item survey of their attitudes toward individuals with AIDS, and a 21-item survey of their attitudes toward homosexuals. Participants also indicated their level of agreement with a policy restricting individuals with AIDS and homosexuals from eight occupations (police officer, restaurant worker, childcare provider, teacher, actor, firefighter, physician, and minister). Orthogonal principal components factor analyses were computed separately on AIDS-Phobia and Homophobia scales. Factor composites were computed from the emergent factors; they tended to show high internal consistency reliability. Associations between the factor composites for the two scales were also examined. In addition, individuals who scored high on the AIDS-Phobia and Homophobia composite scores tended to believe strongly that individuals with AIDS and homosexuals should be restricted from a variety of occupations. (Author/NB)

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Factor Structures of Attitudes Toward Individuals with Aids and Homosexuals

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ABSTRACT

Past research on adults' fear of, and hostile reactions to, individuals with AIDS and homosexuals has tended to treat these reactions as being unidimensional. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the underlying dimensions of attitudes toward individuals with AIDS and homosexuals. A second purpose was to examine the associations between the emergent underlying dimensions for the two sets of attitudes. Orthogonal principal components factor analyses were computed separately on AIDS-Phobia and Homophobia scales. Factor composites were computed from the emergent factors; they tended to show high internal consistency reliability. Associations between the factor composites for the two scales were also examined. In addition, individuals who scored high on the AIDS-Phobia and Homophobia composite scores tended to believe strongly that individuals with AIDS and homosexuals should be restricted from a variety of occupations.

INTRODUCTION

Recent anti-gay sentiment and fear of the disease Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has created near hysteric reactions in the general public. This hysteria has fueled attempts to deprive individuals with AIDS of their civil rights and has provoked violence against gay men and lesbian women (Herek, 1986), making it worthwhile to obtain additional information about attitudes toward homosexuals and individuals with AIDS.

Past research that has examined adults' fear and hostile reactions to homosexuals or individuals with AIDS has tended to treat these reactions as being unidimensional (e.g., Larsen, Michael, & Hoffman, 1980; Lennon, McDevitt, & Sheehan, 1987; Pleck, O'Donnell, O'Donnell, & Snarey, 1986; Temoshok, Sweet, & Zich, 1986). Clearly, it has been worthwhile to create total composite measures of both Homophobia and AIDS-Phobia; with composites of large numbers of items, we have been able to sample from the diverse components that constitute these beliefs. However, it has been argued that Homophobia may not be a unidimensional construct of attitudes and fears (Herek, 1984). Furthermore, because people's attitudes to disabilities in general tend not to be unidimensional (Livneh, 1985), we might expect that people's attitudes to AIDS as an illness are also not unidimensional. Thus, beliefs about civil rights for individuals with AIDS, empathic reactions to individuals with AIDS, and willingness to interact ~~with~~ individuals with AIDS represent potentially separable belief and affect systems. For example, people may feel sympathetic towards patients with AIDS but still wish not to interact with them if they believe that AIDS is transmitted through casual contact.

Our primary purpose in this paper was to examine the underlying dimensions of adults' attitudes toward individuals with AIDS and toward homosexuals. In addition, we examined the associations between the emergent underlying dimensions for both sets of attitudes. In examining these latter associations, we extend previous work that has documented an association between AIDS-Phobia and Homophobia (Pleck et al., 1986; Temoshok, 1986) by identifying more differentiated patterns of association. Finally, we examined the associations between these attitudes and respondents' beliefs about the need to restrict these individuals from certain occupations.

METHOD

The participants were 358 undergraduate and graduate students at a midwestern university, ranging in ages from 17 to 55; 127 were male and 231 were female. On a scale from 1 to 6 with 1 being "Heterosexual" and 6 being "Homosexual," 96.4% of the respondents selected 1 or 2. Only 3.2% selected 3, 4, or 5, and only 0.4% identified themselves as a 6. This study was part of a larger investigation into individuals' attitudes, knowledge, and reasoning concerning AIDS and the correlates of these beliefs (Lennon, McDevitt, & Sheehan, 1987; Sheehan, Lennon, & McDevitt, 1987). Only instruments relevant to the present study will be described here.

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire, a 14-item survey of their attitudes to individuals with AIDS, and a 21-item survey of their attitudes to Homosexuals. The two surveys consisted of 4-level Likert scales. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement to the statements. Statements covered a variety of potential reactions to individuals with AIDS and to Homosexuals, such as their willingness to interact with, and their beliefs about the desirability of restricting the civil rights of, such individuals.

Participants were also asked to indicate their level of agreement to individuals with AIDS and Homosexuals being restricted from eight occupations (police officer, restaurant worker, childcare provider, teacher, actor, firefighter, physician, and minister). A 4-level Likert scale was used.

RESULTS

Participants' responses to the "AIDS-Phobia" and "Homophobia" scales were submitted to separate factor analyses. One item on the Homophobia scale was omitted from analyses because of its ambiguity, which became apparent only after the data were collected. In the two factor analyses, principal components analyses were used to extract factors. The extracted factors were submitted to orthogonal rotation.

Aids-Phobia Scale. In the factor analysis with the AIDS-Phobia Scale, there were 3 factors that exceeded eigenvalues of 1.0 (Table 1) . Together these factors accounted for 58% of the variance. In the first factor, "Restrict Individuals with AIDS," there were 9 variables with factor loadings of .5 or greater. This factor grouped responses indicating that participants would not associate with an individual who had AIDS, did not believe that people with AIDS should be given equal civil rights, did not believe that people with AIDS should live wherever they wanted, did believe that individuals with AIDS should wear a visible medical bracelet, would object if a counseling center were opened in their neighborhood, felt it was all right to fire workers suspected of having AIDS, did not want individuals with AIDS to eat in public restaurants, and agreed that individuals with AIDS should be quarantined. The second factor, "Lack of Empathy for Individuals with AIDS," had 2 variables with loadings of .5 or greater. This factor grouped responses indicating tender, concerned feelings toward people with AIDS and protective feelings for people with AIDS towards whom others were transgressing. The third factor, "Intrusion of Negative Attitudes Toward Gays," grouped the belief that "AIDS is God's judgment on homosexuals" with agreement that high-risk groups should be required to take blood tests for AIDS.

Homophobia Scale. In the factor analysis with the Homophobia Scale, there were 4 factors with eigenvalues that exceeded 1.0 (Table 2). Together the 4 factors accounted for 62% of the variance. In the first factor, "Emotional Prejudice Toward Gays," there were eight variables that had factor loadings of .5 or greater. This factor grouped responses indicating anger with homosexuals for "introducing and maintaining...AIDS," admission of making fun of gays, the belief that gays were justly victimized, disagreement that gays should have equal civil rights, failure to be saddened by discrimination against gays, the belief that it was fair to blame gays for the AIDS crisis, failure to feel protective toward gays that they saw being taken advantage of, and failure to have tender, concerned feelings toward gays. The second factor, "Avoidance of Interaction with Gays," had 5 variables with factor loadings of .5 or greater. This factor grouped responses indicating difficulty in becoming friends with gays, embarrassment at being seen in public with a homosexual, the belief that gays should keep to themselves, failure to have any homosexual friends, and avoidance of people

who they learned were homosexual. The third factor, "Belief that Gays Live an Unnatural Lifestyle," had 5 variables with loadings of .5 or greater. This factor grouped the belief that homosexuality was a sickness, objections to the homosexual sexual orientation, the belief that homosexuality is a sin, agreement that homosexual bars should be closed down, and concern that homosexuality endangered the family. The fourth factor, "Belief that Gays Choose Their Lifestyle," had only one variable with a loading of .5 or greater. This factor distinguished individuals who believed that gays choose their lifestyle.

Reliability of Factor Composites. Additive linear composites were formed for each of the factors based on the items that had factor loadings of .5 or greater. Cronbach's alpha was computed on the factor composites in order to obtain some indication of the internal consistency of the composites (Cronbach, 1951). The alphas were high for five out of seven of the Homophobia and AIDS-Phobia composites; they ranged from .80 to .87 for these five. For the remaining two composites, it appeared that additional items would need to be added to the scales. The fourth Homophobia factor consisted of only one item, beliefs about the extent to which gays choose their lifestyle. The third AIDS-Phobia factor composite, "Intrusion of Negative Attitudes Toward Gays," contained two items and had an alpha of only .44. The total scores for the scales also yielded high reliabilities (.89 for AIDS-Phobia and .92 for Homophobia).

Associations Between Homophobia and AIDS-Phobia Factor Composites. The four Homophobia composites were correlated with the three AIDS-Phobia composites (Table 3). Total scores for the Homophobia and AIDS-Phobia scales were also included. Pearson correlations ranged from .12 to .65. The two highest correlations among the composites were between "Emotional Prejudice Toward Gays" and "Lack of Empathy for Individuals with AIDS (r = .64) and between "Emotional Prejudice Toward Gays" and "Restrict Individuals with AIDS" (r = .65).

Restrictions from Occupations for Individuals with AIDS and Homosexuals. One composite was computed for each of responses to restrictions for individuals with AIDS and responses to homosexuals over eight occupations. Individuals who tended to score high on the AIDS-Phobia and Homophobia composites tended to believe strongly that individuals with AIDS and homosexuals should be restricted from a variety of occupations (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The AIDS-Phobia and Homophobia scales both yielded high internal consistency measures of reliability for the total scores. However, the composites of items based on the factor analyses also produced high reliabilities with a smaller number of items. These findings indicate that although a variety of reactions to AIDS and to gays tend to be interrelated, they also appear to be somewhat distinguishable psychologically.

Two types of factors were common across the AIDS-Phobia and Homophobia factor analyses: a factor that grouped emotional reactions and a factor that grouped beliefs in the need to restrict and avoid individuals with AIDS or gays. Although such affect and belief systems may tend to be related, they may also be distinguishable. For example, an individual may feel empathic toward people with AIDS but wish to avoid them if he or she believes that AIDS is transmitted through casual contact.

There was sustantial evidence that respondents who held negative attitudes toward individuals with AIDS and gays believed that such individuals should be restricted from a variety of occupations. These results provide some evidence for the construct validity of the scales. Further evidence for the construct validity is present in the existence of other variables that are associated with performance on these scales. This evidence is reported elsewhere (Lennon, McDevitt, & Sheehan, 1987; Sheehan, Lennon, & McDevitt, 1987).

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Table 1

Varimax Rotated Factor Matrix for Responses to AIDS-Phobia Items

Item	Rotated Factor Loading		
	Factor 1 Restrict Individuals with AIDS	Factor 2 Lack of Empathy for Individuals with AIDS	Factor 3 Intrusion of Negative Attitudes Toward Gays
1. AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) should be treated as a disease, not a disgrace.	.49	.46	.18
2. I would not associate with an individual if I found out she/he has AIDS.	.60*	.44	.05
3. People with AIDS should be given equal civil rights.	.60*	.37	.04
4. AIDS is God's judgment on homosexuals.	.30	.27	.61*
5. People with AIDS should be able to live wherever they want.	.75*	.16	.08
6. People with AIDS should be restricted from using public bathrooms.	.56*	.20	.34
7. People with AIDS should wear a visible medical bracelet so that other people can avoid them.	.71*	.03	.16

Note. Responses to items were recoded so that high scores in every case indicated a negative reaction to individuals with AIDS.

* Indicates that the item was included in the factor composite.

Table 1 (Cont.)

Varimax Rotated Factor Matrix for Responses to AIDS-Phobia Items

Item	Rotated Factor Loading		
	Factor 1 Restrict Individuals with AIDS	Factor 2 Lack of Empathy for Individuals with AIDS	Factor 3 Intrusion of Negative Attitudes Toward Gays
8. I would not object if a counseling center for AIDS patients were opened in my neighborhood.	.53*	.31	.17
9. People who are suspected of having AIDS should be fired from their jobs because they might infect their co-workers.	.70*	.21	.11
10. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people with AIDS.	.15	.88*	.08
11. When I see someone taking advantage of someone with AIDS, I feel protective towards him or her.	.21	.83*	.17
12. People with AIDS should be allowed to eat in public restaurants.	.72*	.20	.07
13. High risk groups should be required to take a blood test for AIDS.	.07	.03	.88*
14. People with AIDS should be quarantined.	.72*	.10	.26

Note. Responses to items were recoded so that high scores in every case indicated a negative reaction to individuals with AIDS.

* Indicates that the item was included in the factor composite.

Table 2

Varimax Rotated Factor Matrix for Responses to Homophobia Items

Item	Rotated Factor Loading			
	Factor 1 Emotional Prejudice Toward Gays	Factor 2 Avoidance of Inter-action with Gays	Factor 3 Belief that Gays Live an Unnatural Lifestyle	Factor 4 Belief that Gays Choose Their Lifestyle
1. I'd have no difficulty becoming friends with an individual who is homosexual.	.21	.75*	.30	.00
2. I'm angry because homosexuals are responsible for introducing and maintaining the serious health problem of AIDS.	.61*	.26	.36	.15
3. I would not feel embarrassed if I were out with a homosexual acquaintance and I ran into heterosexual friends.	.17	.76*	.24	.03
4. Homosexuals should keep to themselves.	.34	.55*	.37	.13
5. I have at least one friend who is homosexual.	.17	.73*	.20	.13
6. I avoid people of I find out they're homosexual.	.25	.70*	.31	.05
7. I've made fun of homosexuals.	.53*	.30	.07	.22

Note. Responses to items were recoded so that high scores in every case indicated a negative reaction to gays. Item 14 was deleted from the scale because of its ambiguity.

* Indicates that the item was included in the factor composite.

Table 2 (Cont.)

Varimax Rotated Factor Matrix for Responses to Homophobia Items

Item	Rotated Factor Loading			
	Factor 1 Emotional Prejudice Toward Gays	Factor 2 Avoidance of Inter-action with Gays	Factor 3 Belief that Gays Live an Unnatural Lifestyle	Factor 4 Belief that Gays Choose Their Lifestyle
8. Homosexuals have been unjustly victimized.	.70*	.09	.32	.11
9. Homosexuality is a sickness.	.28	.24	.65*	.07
10. Homosexuals should have equal civil rights.	.64*	.06	.35	.18
11. I would be supportive if a close friend told me she/he were homosexual.	.49	.49	.32	.17
12. Homosexuals choose their lifestyle.	.09	.05	.13	.89*
13. I object to the homosexual orientation.	.29	.26	.59*	.20
15. Homosexuality is a sin.	.20	.20	.76*	.10
16. It makes me sad when I see people discriminate against homosexuals.	.68*	.42	.17	.09
17. I think it is unfair to blame homosexuals for the AIDS problem.	.72*	.10	.33	.11

Note. Responses to items were recoded so that high scores in every case indicated a negative reaction to gays. Item 14 was deleted from the scale because of its ambiguity.

* Indicates that the item was included in the factor composite.

Table 2 (Cont.)

Varimax Rotated Factor Matrix for Responses to Homophobia Items

Item	Rotated Factor Loading			
	Factor 1 Emotional Prejudice Toward Gays	Factor 2 Avoidance of Inter-action with Gays	Factor 3 Belief that Gays Live an Unnatural Lifestyle	Factor 4 Belief that Gays Choose Their Lifestyle
18. When I see someone taking advantage of homosexuals, I feel kind of protective towards them.	.64*	.47	.11	.13
19. All homosexual bars should be closed down.	.18	.44	.56	.01
20. I often have tender, concerned feelings for homosexuals.	.59*	.49	.08	.14
21. Homosexuality endangers the institution of the family.	.11	.37	.63*	.25

Note. Responses to items were recoded so that high scores in every case indicated a negative reaction to gays. Item 14 was deleted from the scale because of its ambiguity.

* Indicates that the item was included in the factor composite.

Table 3

Pearson Correlations Among Factor Composites and Total Scores for AIDS-Phobia and Homophobia Items

	Homophobia Composites				Total Scores	
	Factor 1 Emotional Prejudice Toward Gays	Factor 2 Avoidance of Interaction with Gays	Factor 3 Belief that Gays Live an Unnatural Lifestyle	Factor 4 Belief that Gays Choose Their Lifestyle	Homophobia Total Score	AIDS-Phobia Total Score
AIDS-Phobia Composites						
Factor 1 Restrict Individuals with AIDS	.64***	.53***	.54***	.11*	.66***	.95**
Factor 2 Lack of Empathy for Individuals with AIDS	.65***	.45***	.47***	.13*	.60***	.67**
Factor 3 Intrusion of Negative Attitudes Toward Gays	.49***	.42***	.51***	.17**	.55***	.61**
Total Scores						
Homophobia	.90***	.87***	.86***	.21***		.75**
AIDS-Phobia	.73***	.59***	.61***	.15**	.75***	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 4

Pearson Correlations Between Beliefs in Restrictions From Occupations and AIDS-Phobia and Homophobia Composites

	Restrictions for Individuals with AIDS	Restrictions for Homosexuals
AIDS-Phobia Composites		
Restrict Individuals with AIDS	.64***	.56***
Lack of Empathy for Individuals with AIDS	.41***	.37***
Intrusion of Negative Attitudes Toward Gays	.41***	.43***
Homophobia Composites		
Emotional Prejudice Toward Gays	.52***	.57***
Avoidance of Interaction with Gays	.46***	.60***
Belief that Gays Live an Unnatural Lifestyle	.48***	.64***
Belief that Gays Choose Their Lifestyle	.13*	.12*
Total Scores		
Homophobia	.54***	.68***
AIDS-Phobia	.65***	.59***

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$